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ABSTRACT

I. A. Richards (most easily recognized as the "father" of New Criticism, but a true interdisciplinarian) bears re-examination in light of present discussions over the role and nature of rhetoric as a discipline. Richards' work has more to offer than is presently recognized. First, his work in toto exemplifies the capability and possible role of rhetoricians to reflect and unify the diversity of disciplines in the modern university. Second, his various investigations and speculations in the different disciplines are, for the most part, still unrecognized and unused. His concerns about what rhetoric is and how it is to be used have neither been resolved nor shelved. "The Philosophy of Rhetoric" is a good example of a work which represents the essential characteristics of Richards' thoughts on language and its uses. This paper studies the aims of discourse and types of context, the interinanimation of words, some criteria of words, metaphor, and the command of metaphor. (An attachment contains lecture synopses on "The Philosophy of Rhetoric" and a select Richards bibliography.) (SR)

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RECONSIDERING I. A. RICHARDS' ROLE IN THE NEW RHETORIC: PREDECESSOR, PRESTIDIGITATOR, PROPONENT

Most easily recognized as the "father" of New Criticism, I. A. Richards has often been shunted aside by both current literary critics and contemporary compositionists and rhetoricians. However, his role in the development of New Criticism was but a minor (and a misunderstood) aspect of Richards' many areas of inquiry. A true interdisciplinarian, Richards provides seminal insight into areas as diverse and as related as linguistics and semantics, education theory, reading and interpretation, the study of metaphor, reading and writing connections, writing across the disciplines, writing and thinking connections, cognitive models, classical rhetoric, translation, second language learning, the nature of rhetoric--the list goes on. Ignored by all but a few contemporary composition/rhetoric figures, Richards bears re-examination in light of present discussions over the role and nature of rhetoric as a discipline.

I argue that Richards has much more to offer than presently recognized. First, Richards' work in toto exemplifies the capability and possible role of rhetoricians to reflect and unify the diversity of disciplines in the modern university. Second, his various investigations and speculations in the different disciplines are, for the most part, still unrecognized and unused. Apparently, the very diversity which is so suggestible is held against him. Additionally, his concerns about what

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rhetoric is and how it is to be used, have neither been resolved nor shelved. Those selfsame concerns reappeared in the 1960s and re-reappeared in the 1980s.

Given only twenty minutes, I'm not capable of fully representing Richards and his myraid works. Richards has covered a lot of ground over his long career. I've chosen to focus, instead, on one of Richard's works, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, which seems the most appropriate to the title of this session, "Philosophers on Rhetoric."

The opening lines of The Philosophy of Rhetoric are strident:

> These lectures are an attempt to revive an old subject. I need spend no time, I think, in describing the present state of Rhetoric. Today it is the dreariest and least profitable part of the waste that the unfortunate travel through in Freshman English! So low has Rhetoric sunk that we would do better just to dismiss it to Limbo than to trouble ourselves with it--unless we can find reason for believing that it can become a study that will minister successfully to important needs. (3)

From them, Richards goes on to sketch some of his "ideas in progress." The Philosophy of Rhetoric is not a self-contained "philosophy." Rather its value is its suggestability. Richards packs ideas into a few words, a paragraph, like one packs a parachute. Nor is there anything definitive about Richards' ideas except at the time they occur. His ideas and their impetus are mutable; they do not stand still. As such, he is not easy to "interpret." My strategy today is to let Richards speak for

himself as much as possible. What I have for you then are quotes from various places in The Philosophy of Rhetoric, quotes which represent essential characteristics in Richards' thoughts on language and its uses. I'll first present a brief sketch of Richards' works, and then the layout of The Philosophy of Rhetoric in the form of quotes with some commentary. If there is time I will discuss the the selected bibliography of Richards' works on the handout.

I. A. Richards (1893-1979) and The Philosophy of Rhetoric

Richards is probably best known to us as a literary critic, a founding member of New Criticism. John Crowe Ransome notes in The New Criticism (1941): "The new criticism very nearly begins with [Richards]. It might be said also that it began with him in the right way, because he attempted to found on a more comprehensive basis than other critics did" (5). Stanely Hyman suggests in The Armed Vision (1948) that Richards marked "almost every serious critic working in our time" (6). British scholars such as Leavis, Turnell, Empson, Read, and Americans such as Ransom, Tate, Brooks, Warren, Blackmur, and Winters were strongly influenced by Richards' works Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) and Practical Criticism (1929).

But with the wane of New Criticism, Richards has fallen into disfavor. Berthoff notes, "Nowadays, it is hard to find a graduate student or a young instructor who has any notion of the role IAR played in shaping modern criticism, to say nothing of the one he wanted to play in modern education" (195). She

suggests Richards is wrongly identified with "such a notion as 'the words on the page,'" which "is the product of third-rate pedagogues and critics and should not be identified with IAR's philosophy of rhetoric" (196). She goes on to suggest we reexamine Richards' works in light of what they offer "to those of us who want to learn to teach writing" (196). In mentioning my own interests in Richards and rhetoric, I've heard him referred to, somewhat pejoratively, as a behaviorist, a positivist, and most definitely not a rhetorician. The most common response, however, is bafflement--the majority seem to have heard the name, but can't quite remember the context.

And in some ways, little wonder. His influence seems to be everywhere. Jerome Bruner, the cognitive psychologist, recognized Richards as one of his most memorable teachers at Harvard. Stephen Toulmin used to sleep on his couch. Kenneth Burke acknowledges and often argues with Richards in many of his books. Ann Berthoff is a strident fan. Korzybski and the entire semantist movement note a great debt to him. He took on Mortimer Adler and his How to Read a Book, with a parody titled How to Read a Page: A Course in Effective Reading with an Introduction to a Hundred Great Words. One can not examine metaphor without encountering Richards. Louise Rosenblatt and the reader-response movement were an immediate response to Richards. In a note, she suggests Practical Criticism "is a work every teacher of literature should read" (96n). His use of protocols is the first that I've encountered. Again, the list goes on.

Richards' longstanding interests in the influence of language upon the way we think (first evidenced in his

collaboration with C. K. Ogden on The Meaning of Meaning, 1923) and a concern with how much we fail in communicating with one another stayed with him through a long and productive life. These concerns mark him, for me, as pivotal elements in identifying him as a rhetorician. To the consternation of literary critics, he moved more and more away from the singular analyses of literary text towards a more encompassing philosphical examination of language itself and the uses of that examination, especially in learning. As Berthoff suggests "even his contraditions are heuristic." ("I. A. Richards" 80)

One sees glimpses of why in The Philosophy of Rhetoric (1936):

> Words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition, come together. They are the occasion and the means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavour to order itself. That is why we have language. It is no mere signalling system. It is the instrument of all our distinctively human development . . . (131)

As Marie Hochmuth Nichols notes, "Even if Richards had never written a book uder the caption of The Philosophy of Rhetoric, his other works would have considerable relevance for the student of rhetoric" (2). And rather than label Richards a literary critic at all, I would argue that "rhetorician" is a more apt title, a title which more comprehensively allows his inquiries into literary criticism, linguistics (especially semantics),

philosophy, psychology, and education--subsidiary concerns to Richards as he makes his inquiries into a more fundamental nature of language.

Putting Robert Scott's "On Not Defining Rhetoric" aside, I suggest (and often use myself when trying to explain to people what I do for a living) Richards's rather pithy definition: "Rhetoric, I shall urge, should be a study of misunderstandings and its remedies" (PR 3). Of course, Richards immediately complicates this, linking rhetoric and its study with ideas, with thought as inseparable from language. And then he goes on to complicate this:

> But an idea or a notion, when unencumbered and undisguised, is no easier to get hold of than one of those oiled and naked thieves who infest the railway carriages of India. Indeed an idea, or a notion, like the physicist's ultimate particles and rays, is only known by what it does. (PR 5)

He gives us little certainty to rest on:

> To account for understanding and misunderstanding, to study the efficiency of language and its conditions, we have to renounce, for a while, the view that words just have their meanings and that what a discourse does is to be explained as a composition of these meanings--as a wall can be represented as a composition of its bricks. (9)

And he does let up on us either:

> The chief cause of misunderstanding . . . is the Proper Meaning Superstitition. That is, the common belief--encouraged officially by what lingers on in the school manuals as Rhetoric--that a word has a meaning of its own

> (ideally, only one) independent of and controlling its use and the purpose for which it should be uttered. (11)

With this sort of preview, I want to turn your attention then to my own peculiar sketch of The Philosophy of Rhetoric. It is a small book, less than 140 pages (and one of Richards' books still in print), yet as I hope I demonstrate, a very large book.

Table of Contents with Synopses

Originally presented lectures at Bryn Mawr in 1936, the text retains some of its oratorical capacity--perhaps why I rely so heavily on quotes from it here.

I. Introductory

Argues for a "persistent, systematic, detailed inquiry in how words work that will take the place of the discredited subject which goes by the name of Rhetoric" (23). He urges that this inquiry be philosphical, that a revived Rhetoric must inquire into the modes of meaning, both on a macroscopic scale ("discussing the effects of different disposals of large parts of a discourse") and on a microscopic scale (establishing "theorems about the structure of the fundamental conjectural units of meaning and the conditions through which they, and their interconnections arise").

II. The Aims of Discourse and Types of Context

Suggests the uses of Old Rhetoric (use of evidence; dispute and persuasion). Argues, however, that the New Rhetoric must go further in meeting two problems: 1) "the division of the various aims of discourse, the purposes for which we speak or write; in brief, the functions of language" (28); 2) "What is the connection between the mind and the world by which events in the mind and the world mean other events in the world? Or 'How does a thought come to be "of" whatever it is that it is a thought of?' or 'What is the relation between a thing and its name?'" (28). He goes onto argue with the Eighteenth Century's concept of abstraction and proposes a context-based theorem of meaning, a theorem which accounts for multiplicity of meanings, the "interinanimation" of words, and ambiguity.

III. The Interinanimation of Words

Focuses on the question of "What happens when we try with a sentence to decide what single words mean?" (47). Discusses the interdependence of words and illustrates the "<u>movement</u> among meanings . . . . We have change as the sentence develops. In 'The cat is on the mat' we begin with the cat and end with the mat. There is a progression of some sort in every explicit sentence" (49). Argues against the historical (and prevailing) approaches to Usage and considers the influence of words actually in a text.

IV. Some Criteria of Words

Extends his idea that words are context-based, that "a completely isolated word would be meaningless" (70). Notes and suggests the utility of the creation of new words, while continuing his arguments with those who advocate correct Usage and those who declaim these new words. He suggests Usage "makes the conduct of language subservient to manners--to the manners of a special set of speakers . . . . One of the tasks of an improved Rhetoric is to question it, whether it concerns pronunciation or matters of meaning or interpretation" (78).

V. Metaphor

Introduces metaphor as those processes in which we perceive of or think of or feel about one thing in terms of another. Refutes assumptions about metaphor: 1) that use of metaphor is a gift only some have--"But we all live, and speak, only through our eye for resemblances" (89); 2) that use of metaphor cannot be taught--"As individuals we gain our command of metaphor just as we learn whatever else makes us distinctively human. It is all imparted to us from others, with and through the language we learn, language which is utterly unable to aid us except through the command of metaphor which it gives" (90); 3) that metaphor is a special and exceptional use of language, a "happy, extra trick with words, an opportunity to exploit the accidents of their versatility, something in place occassionally but requiring unusual skill and caution" (90)--rather, he argues, echoing Bentham and Shelley, that it is the constitutive form of language, that "the mind and all its doings are fictions" (91),

as well as being the "omnipresent principle of language" (92).

He goes on to develop a technical treatment of metaphor by introducing its two halves: tenor (the underlying idea or principle subject, the plain meaning) and vehicle (the figures of speech, the language mechanism) and then argues we derive meaning from both halves, to varying degrees, based on their context. He continues to urge us toward a deeper awareness of the prevasiveness of metaphor: "Our world is a projected world, shot through with characters lent it from our own life. 'We receive but what we give.' The processes of metaphor in language, the exchanges between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor . . ." (108-9).

VI. The Command of Metaphor

Continues his treatment of metaphor, extending it as pervasive and omipresent, while proposing it as a model we use to think about things. His evidence is that our words in "ordinary fluid discourse" are constantly shifting, meaning different things at different times, and that we mean different things at the same time--"we compound different uses of the word into one" (116). He also sums up his "philosophy": ". . . with enough improvement in Rhetoric we may in time learn so much about words that they will tell us how our minds work. It seems modest and reasonable to combine these dreams and hope that a patient persistence with

the problems of Rhetoric may, while exposing the causes and modes of the misinterpretation of words, also throw light upon and suggest a remedial disipline for deeper and more grievous disorders; that, as the small and local errors in our everyday misunderstandings with language are models in miniature of the greater errors which disturb the development of our personalities, their study may also show us more about how these large scale disasters may be avoided" (136-7).

Suggesting that all of the ideas of The Philosophy of Rhetoric make a philosophy may be stretching things a bit. (Richards was not overly concerned with limited goals.) But for some time now our discipline has been discussing not just a new rhetoric, but new rhetorics. Our discipline seems to thrive on plurality. And given the nature of our discipline, its comprehensiveness and prevasiveness, we have a lot of room to integrate as many varied contributions as possible. Richards' many contributions may not be the completely worked out philosophy George Campbell presents, as Daniel Fogarty suggests in Roots for a New Rhetoric (6), but it is most definitely an assertion of the central importance of language in the modern world. And Richards' contributions are designed to address the problems of the modern world.

What I have tried to do here is to revive our attention in Richards. The title of this presentation,

RECONSIDERING I. A. RICHARDS' ROLE IN THE NEW RHETORIC:
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is, admittedly, a not fully worked out description. So far. In a study of encyclopedia entries on rhetoric over the last two hundred years, I've noted that it wasn't until mid-century that any distinction between classical rhetoric and a "new" rhetoric began to appear. A bit earlier (1942), Eric Partridge in Usage and Abusage: A Guide to Good English noted "There are two Rhetorics: the old and the new. Of the old, a typical expositor is Alexander Bain . . . ; of the new, the best expositor is Dr. I. A. Richards, whose The Philosophy of Rhetoric has done so much to rehabilitate both the art and the study thereof" (273). For most, rhetoric at the time was still essentially that of Aristotle, the art of persuasion. Richards, arguing for a more pragmatic, more comprehensive view of rhetoric, put forth that "Persuasion is only one among the aims of discourse. It poaches on the others--especially on that of exposition" (PR 24). No other figure of that time, a time not so long ago, I suggest, has had such an important role in not only reviving our attention to rhetoric, but in revising our perceptions and uses of it. Hence my suggestion that Richards is a direct predecessor of what we are today.

Richards as a prestidigitator is my having fun. However, if we look at the term's origins, the original French use of the word to signify a juggler and its Latin root preste or "nimbleness," then I think I can get away with it. But like any sleight of hand one can not look too closely. Richards does go awry at times, but rather than condemn him for his misunderstandings, let us extend and explore them. Picture the sheer number of ideas and their wide range among the disciplines

that Richards was continually juggling in his attempts to create a "persistent, systematic, detailed inquiry into how words work that will take the place of the discredited subject which goes by the name of Rhetoric" (PR 23).

Richards as proponent of rhetoric, especially the new rhetoric is obvious. It echoes throughout all of his works. It is probably the most pervasive of themes in his long career. And though Donald Enholm warns us away from the "enthusiasm of their [he also discussed Burke] claims and their evangelistic impulse to save the world" (223), this evangelicism may end up being one of the most attractive features in Richards. Language, "the instrument of all our distinctively human development" (PR 131), is most probably the only thing we have with which to continue that development.

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Reconsidering I. A. Richards' Role in the New Rhetoric: Predecessor, Prestidigitator, Proponent

Lecture synopses: I. A. Richards' The Philosophy of Rhetoric

Lecture I: Introductory
Argues for a "persistent, systematic, detailed inquiry in how words work that will take the place of the discredited subject which goes by the name of Rhetoric" (23). He urges that this inquiry be philosphical, that a revived Rhetoric must inquire into the modes of meaning, both on a macroscopic scale ("discussing the effects of different disposals of large parts of a discourse") and on a microscopic scale (establishing "theorems about the structure of the fundamental conjectural units of meaning and the conditions through which they, and their interconnections arise").

Lecture II: The Aims of Discourse and Types of Context
Suggests the uses of Old Rhetoric (use of evidence; dispute and persuasion). Argues, however, that the New Rhetoric must go further in meeting two problems: 1) "the division of the various aims of discourse, the purposes for which we speak or write; in brief, the functions of language" (28); 2) "What is the connection between the mind and the world by which events in the mind and the world mean other events in the world? Or 'How does a thought come to be "of" whatever it is that it is a thought of?' or 'What is the relation between a thing and its name?'" (28). He goes onto argue with the Eighteenth Century's concept of abstraction and proposes a context-based theorem of meaning, a theorem which accounts for multiplicity of meanings, the "interinanimation" of words, and ambiguity.

Lecture III: The Interinanimation of Words
Focuses on the question of "What happens when we try with a sentence to decide what single words mean?" (47). Discusses the interdependence of words and illustrates the "movement among meanings . . . . We have change as the sentence develops. In 'The cat is on the mat' we begin with the cat and end with the mat. There is a progression of some sort in every explicit sentence" (49). Argues against the historical (and prevailing) approaches to Usage and considers the influence of words actually in a text.

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Extends his idea that words are context-based, that "a completely isolated word would be meaningless" (70). Notes and suggests the utility of the creation of new words, while continuing his arguments with those who advocate correct Usage and those who declaim these new words. He suggests Usage "makes the conduct of language subservient to manners--to the manners of a special set of speakers . . . . One of the tasks of an

improved Rhetoric is to question it, whether it concerns pronunciation or matters of meaning or interpretation" (78).

Lecture V: Metaphor
Introduces metaphor as those processes in which we perceive of or think of or feel about one thing in terms of another. Refutes assumptions about metaphor: 1) that use of metaphor is a gift only some have--"But we all live, and speak, only through our eye for resemblances" (89); 2) that use of metaphor cannot be taught--"As individuals we gain our command of metaphor just as we learn whatever else makes us distinctively human. It is all imparted to us from others, with and through the language we learn, language which is utterly unable to aid us except through the command of metaphor which it gives" (90); 3) that metaphor is a special and exceptional use of language, a "happy, extra trick with words, an opportunity to exploit the accidents of their versatility, something in place occassionally but requiring unusual skill and caution" (90)--rather, he argues, echoing Bentham and Shelley, that it is the constitutive form of language, that "the mind and all its doings are fictions" (91), as well as being the "omnipresent principle of language" (92).

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Lecture VI: The Command of Metaphor
Continues his treatment of metaphor, extending it as pervasive and omipresent, while proposing it as a model we use to think about things. His evidence is that our words in "ordinary fluid discourse" are constantly shifting, meaning different things at different times, and that we mean different things at the same time--"we compound different uses of the word into one" (116). He also sums up his "philosophy": ". . . with enough improvement in Rhetoric we may in time learn so much about words that they will tell us how our minds work. It seems modest and reasonable to combine these dreams and hope that a patient persistence with the problems of Rhetoric may, while exposing the causes and modes of the misinterpretation of words, also throw light upon and suggest a remedial disipline for deeper and more grievous disorders; that, as the small and local errors in our everyday misunderstandings with language are models in miniature of the greater errors which disturb the development of our personalities, their study may also show us more about how these large scale disasters may be avoided" (136-7).

A Select Richards Bibliography

[Ann Berthoff relates that Richards was once asked which of his books to begin reading him. He replied that one should start with the last and read backward.]

A chronological listing of selected titles by I. A. Richards which are of special interest to those who study rhetoric:

The Foundations of Aesthetics (1922)
[Available in library binding from Haskell, 1974 ed. #40, $75]
The Meaning of Meaning with C. K. Ogden (1923)
[Available from Harcourt in paper, 1959, $5.95]
Principles of Literary Criticism (1924)
[Available from Harvard UP, 1961, $7.95]
Science and Poetry (1926)
[Available in library binding from Haskell, 1974 ed. #38, $75]
[Republished by Richards as Poetries and Sciences, Norton paperback, 1972, $2.25]
Practical Criticism (1929)
[Available from Harcourt in paper, 1956, $7.95]
Mencius on the Mind (1932)
[Available as a 1981 reprinting by Hyperion, $18.50]
*Basic Rules of Reason (1933)
*Coleridge on Imagination (1934)
[Richards introduced and edited the Portable Coleridge, Viking #48, 1977 Penguin, $7.95]
*Basic in Teaching: East and West (1935)
The Philosophy of Rhetoric (1936)
[Available from Oxford UP in paper, 1965, $6.95]
*Interpretation in Teaching (1938)
*Basic English and Its Uses (1943)
*How to a Read a Page (1943)
*Speculative Instruments (1955)
*So Much Nearer: Essays Toward a World English (1960)
*Design for Escape (1968)
*Beyond (1973)
*Techniques for Language Control (1974)
Complementaries: I. A. Richards' Uncollected Essays
[Edited by John Paul Russo, Harvard UP, 1976, $20]

*No longer in print. [Ann Berthoff is currently assembling a selection of Richards on rhetoric which hopefully, will be available soon.]

Only two books on Richards are in print:
I. A. Richards: Essays in His Honor, ed. Reuben Brower et al, Oxford UP, 1973, $22.50.

John Paul Russo has an 850+ page critical biography on Richards due out any day from Johns Hopkins University Press (1989, $39.95).